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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the parent-child relationship antecedents of a multidimensional model of moral character among late adolescents. The model posits that the configuration of five character dimensions explains the moral behavior displayed by an individual. The dimensions are moral knowledge, socialization, empathy, autonomy and ethical attitudes. Two parent-child dimensions relating to moral development are parental acceptance and parental control. The study hypothesizes that parental acceptance and moderately high control are positively related to character dimensions. The subjects are college students, and the study utilizes self-report and retrospective ratings of parent behavior. Significant correlations were found between the parent-child variables and two dimensions of moral character--socialization and empathy. Although, in general, the results are consistent with current trends, the findings regarding parental control are somewhat divergent. In the studied sample, the more permissive parental transactions with high acceptance and low control seem the most facilitative of moral character development. This is explained developmentally. (NG)

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THE EFFECTS OF PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF MORAL CHARACTER

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Interest in morality has been shared by many disciplines other than psychology and within psychology there are a number of approaches to moral behavior. A common concern among all theorists is the process by which an orientation to moral behavior is developed in the individual. The purpose of the present study was to investigate the parent-child relationship antecedents of a multidimensional model of moral character in late adolescents.

Previous studies on the development of moral behavior have represented various theoretical approaches and thus have focused on one or two key variables. For example, the psychoanalytic viewpoint has generally emphasized guilt in the conflict between intra psychic impulses and socialization forces (id vs. superego). Cognitive approaches such as those of Piaget (1932) and Kohlberg (1970) have emphasized the importance of cognitive reasoning in moral behavior. Learning theory approaches have emphasized the roles of inhibition, reinforcement and modeling. In a recent review of the literature, Hoffman (1970) suggests that categorizing moral behavior in terms of single theoretical emphases may be an artificial separation of a larger more integrated process. His analysis suggests that a unitary approach to morality is inadequate in light of the complexity of the subject matter.

As an alternative to the more unitary approaches to morality, Hogan (1973) has proposed a five-dimensional model of personal moral character from which moral behavior is manifest. Hogan posits that the type of moral behavior displayed by an individual can be explained by the configuration of five character dimensions for that individual. The five dimensions

are: moral knowledge, socialization, empathy, autonomy, and a dimension of moral judgment referred to as ethical attitudes. Hogan (1973) has found that of the five dimensions moral knowledge is the least salient for studying individual differences. Thus only the dimensions of socialization, empathy, autonomy and ethical attitudes were included in the present study .

Socialization is considered to be the degree that an individual regards the rules, values, and prohibitions of his society to be personally mandatory; it is a conformity factor.

Empathy is the factor that influences a person to act from a moral viewpoint in that he tries to consider the implications of his actions on the welfare of others. Empathy has often been considered to be role-taking ability.

Autonomy is an independence factor which arises from the assumption that sometimes to be moral an individual must stand against the collective norms of his society. A truly moral person has an autonomous will and governs his actions by a sense of personal duty rather than mere conformity to social expectations.

Ethical attitudes is a bipolar continuum the extremes of which are ethics of conscience (an intuitive orientation to morality), and ethics of responsibility (a legalistic orientation). Hogan theorizes that the healthy position on this dimension is midway between the extremes.

There is considerable evidence for antecedent conditions to a number of aspects of personality development which overlap Hogan's concepts. Cumulative evidence suggests two key dimensions of the parent-child interaction which are facilitative of healthy child development. A number of

factors analytic studies have consistently identified the dimension of parental acceptance and parental control (Goldin, 196º; Armentraut & Berger, 1972).

Parental acceptance has repeatedly emerged as a key dimension relating positively to moral development (Sears, Maccoby, & Levine, 1957; Payne & Mussen, 1956; Hoffman, 1963). Conversely, an atmosphere of rejection is associated with maladaptive development (Kagan, 1958; Jackson, 1950). Hoffman (1970) suggests that acceptance may only be the context within which various types of parental practices take place, but regardless, acceptance is an important factor.

A second major parent-child dimension is parental control or how strict versus how lax a parent is. The absence of any parental control has been associated with increased aggression (Hollenburg and Sperry, 1951), and generally maladaptive development (Baumrind, 1971). On the other hand, overly punitive parental control is associated with a number of ill effects on moral development (Aronfreed, 1961; Allinsmith, 1960; Levin & Sears, 1956).

The elusive middle ground between complete permissiveness and extreme punitiveness has been studied by numerous researchers in search of salient factors. The manner in which the control is administered appears to be important. Love withdrawal or psychological control through guilt are major styles of parental control. However, the cumulative research evidence as to its impact on moral development is equivocal in that clear patterns have not been found (Hoffman, 1970). Power assertive disipline styles have been shown to be counter-productive of moral internalization,

and seem to foster an external moral orientation such as wariness of getting caught (Hoffman, 1960). Inductive or reasoning oriented discipline techniques have been associated with general internaization, especially as children grow older (Aronfreed, 1961; Hoffman and Saltzstein, 1960; Grusec, 1966). Developmental trends suggest that power oriented techniques decrease in effectiveness with increased age, and inductive techniques increase in effectiveness with increased age (Jensen & Buhanan, 1974).

Based upon Hogan's dimension of possible antecedents to the character dimensions and the evidence cited above we hypothesized that parental acceptance and moderately high control would be positively related to character dimensions. As to more specific parental practices, power assertive techniques were expected to show negative relationships and inductive techniques were expected to show positive relationships to the character dimensions.

Methods

Subjects

The subjects were 76 male and 68 female students in psychology classes at a Los Angeles area junior college. The course instructor (not one of the researchers in this study) administered the questionnaire over two class periods. These subjects were given research participation credit for responding. The 144 subjects were selected from a larger pool of respondents so that all were between the ages of 17 and 30 and from two-parent unbroken homes. Most of the subjects currently live at home. The bulk of the subjects were 18-and 19-year-olds. The demographic data collected for each subject included age, sex, gradepoint average, major area of study, father's education, and father's occupation.

Procedure

The subjects were asked to answer self-report questions from the scales that formed the dependent variables (character dimensions). For the independent variables (parent-child dimensions) the subjects were asked to rate retrospectively how their parents acted toward them during their elementary and high school years.

The parent-child relationship questionnaire was a 40 item scale modeled after that developed by Roe and Seigelman (1963). A Likert-type response format with a scale from 1 to 5 was used. The mother and father forms were identical. Items taping each of the following areas were included: acceptance, rejection, firm control, lax control, psychological control, psychological autonomy, induction and power assertaion.

Empirical scales were derived from the parent-child questionnaires by means of factor analysis. The factor-analytic variables were computed by multiplying the item score by the factor loading. Only items with loadings of .30 or greater were included in computation of the factor variables. The factor variables so created were labelled as: induction acceptance (a variable combining the induction and acceptance scales), power assertion, psychological control, psychological autonomy, rejection, and firm control.

The character variable socialization was measured with Gough's (1969) 54 item socialization scale in the California Personality Inventory.

Empathy was measured with a modified version of Hogan's (1969) empirically keyed empathy scale. In order to insure construct validity items that were redundant or inconsistent with the construct of empathy as used in this study were eliminated and other itmes were added which were judged by the researchers to be representative of the trait of empathy;

the ability to perceive the point of view, feelings, and needs of others.

The autonomy scale used by Hogan was a 22 item independence of judgment measure developed by Barron (1953). For this study the autonomy scale was somewhat altered by removing items which appeared to have least construct validity and adding a series of items taken from an assertiveness scale (Galassi & Galassi, 1974). The research on assertiveness is consistent with the construct of autonomy in Hogan's model.

The measurement used for the survey of ethical attitudes was the unaltered questionnaire developed by Hogan (1970). The survey of ethical attitudes has two parallel forms with a reliability coefficient of .88. Form B was used in the present study.

Results and Discussion

Significant correlational relationships were found between the parent-child variables and two of the dimensions of moral character- socialization and empathy . The investigation of the demographic data was generally inconsequential. There were no significant correlations between the Hollingshead measure of socio-economic status and any of the independent or dependent variables.

The matrices of the correlations between the character variables and the parent variables are presented in Table 1. Socialization was the moral character variable most consistently correlated with the parent variables. Examination of both mother and father correlations indicates that the relationships to socialization and in the same direction for both parents. However, the correlations with the mother variables are stronger than the correlations with the father variables. Socialization correlated positively

with induction-acceptance and psychological autonomy, and negatively with power assertion, firm control, psychological control and rejection. It appears that a generally accepting parental style is associated with socialization. The authoritarian-controling parental position relates negatively to socialization thus representing a counterproductive influence.

Empathy also correlated significantly with many of the parent variables and in general the patterns were similar to those of socialization. The mother variables again were more strongly correlated with empathy than father variables, though not significantly so. It is again the accepting parenting style that is associated with empathy; however, the negative correlations are not as clear. The negative effects of controling dimensions are seen for only two of the parent variables. Apparently a child will most likely develop empathy in an accepting environment that is not overly controlling.

For both autonomy and ethical attitudes there was little evidence of Linear relationships between these two dependent variables and the twelve parent variables. The one exception was a low positive correlation (.14) between ethical attitudes and mother firm control. This correlation is in the direction of strict parenting being associated with the rules oriented ethics of responsibility.

The combined relationship of the parent child dimensions to each of the four character variables was analyzed using stepwise multiple regression techniques. The regressions were done for the mother variables as a group and the father variables as a group.

In the stepwise analysis, only variables which resulted in significant increases in variance explained (R^2) were included in the regression equation. The results are summarized in Table 2. Under the above criteria only the regressions

for socialization produced significant incremental R^2 beyond the first variable. The first variable in the equation for each parents was induction-acceptance. For mothers, induction-acceptance accounted for 18.1% of the variance in socialization. For fathers, the same variable accounted for 10.9% of the variance of socialization. Mother rejection explained an additional 3.4% of socilization variance which was a significant increase in R^2 ($F = 5.5$, $df = 1$ and 141, $p < .05$). Father power assertion accounted for an additional 2.8% of the variance in socialization which was also significant. ($F = 4.23$, $df = 1$ and 141, $p < .05$). The incremental R^2 for the remaining parent variables were nonsignificant.

Induction-acceptance was the only variable entered into the stepwise regression of empathy on the parent variables for both mothers and fathers. The remaining variables failed to produce significant increases in R^2.

A summary of the linear relationships between the character variables and the parent variables was obtained separately for mothers and fathers using canonical correlation. The canonical loadings are presented in Table 3 for both mothers and fathers. Bartlett's chi square test (Dixon, 1975) was used to assess the statistical significance of the canonical correlations. With four independent variables three canonical variate solutions are possible. However, in this study only the first solution was significant for mothers. The canonical correlation of the father variables was not significant. The overall canonical correlation for the mother variables with the character variables was .51 ($p < .001$). The canonical correlation for the father variables was .41 ($p > .05$).

Table 1

Correlations Between Independent and Dependent Variables

	Mother Variables					
	Induction-Acceptance	Power Assertion	Firm Control	Psych. Control	Psych. Autonomy	Reject
Socialization	.43**	-.27**	-.33**	-.17*	.42**	-.41**
Empathy	.30**	-.08	-.18*	-.06	.24*	-.25**
Autonomy	.04	.03	-.09	.04	.01	-.03
Ethical Attitudes	.00	.05	.14*	-.01	.00	.02

	Father Variables					
	Induction-Acceptance	Power Assertion	Firm Control	Psych. Control	Psych. Autonomy	Reject
Socialization	.33**	-.27**	-.16*	-.25**	.32**	.06
Empathy	.20*	-.14	-.07	-.18*	.17*	-.16*
Autonomy	-.04	.09	.06	.08	-.06	.10
Ethical Attitudes	.08	-.02	.06	.08	.01	-.07

*P < .05 **P < .001

Table 2

Summary of Stepwise Regression Analysis of Socialization on Parent-Variables for Mothers and Fathers

Parent Variable	R	R^2	Increase in R^2
Mother			
Induction-Acceptance	.426	.181	
Rejection	.446	.215	.038
Father			
Induction-Acceptance	.33	.109	
Power Assertion	.37	.137	.028

Table 3

Canonical Correlations of Character Variables with Parent Variables

	Canonical Loadings	
	Mother	Father
Socialization	.92	.94
Autonomy	.16	-.12
Empathy	.67	.60
Survey of Ethical Attitudes	-.05	.22
Power Assertion	-.47	.78
Induction-Acceptance	.89	.85
Psychological Contorl	-.29	-.67
Rejection	-.82	-.35
Psychological Autonomy	.83	-.67
Firm Control	.69	-.75
Canonical Correlation	.51	.41
	$P < .01$	$p > .05$

The highest loadings among the character variables were for socialization and empathy. This was expected in light of the Pearson correlations. The loadings among the parent variables suggest a single bipolar parenting factor. The accepting and autonomy granting variables showed positive loadings and the rejecting and controlling parental variables had negative loadings. The three strongest loadings for both mothers and fathers were induction-acceptance, psychological autonomy and rejection. For mothers the smallest loading was psychological control and for fathers the smallest loading was firm control.

In summarizing the linear relationships, it is apparent that only socialization and empathy were significantly predicted by the parent variables. Any relationships between the parent variables and autonomy and the survey of ethical attitudes were not obtained through purely linear correlational techniques. For socialization and empathy it appeared that the generally permissive and accepting parenting style is the most conducive to the development of these traits. The six parent variables did not display much uniqueness in predicting socialization and empathy and seemed to be manifestations of a more general parenting style. This was apparent in the regression equations which showed very little incremental increase with the addition of variables. This trend was also seen in the canonical variate loadings where only the first solution was significant and all of the parent variables loaded high. There seems to be a general bipolar parenting factor the positive pole of which is related to socialization and empathy and the negative pole of which is counter-productive of these traits. The accepting parenting trait includes acceptance

with induction and autonomy granting discipline. The reverse of this parenting style includes rejection with controlling, power oriented discipline.

Non-linear explorations were made to determine whether or not there were any deviations from strictly linear relationships assumed in the correlational analysis. In order to do this, the character variables were divided into three groups of approximate thirds on the basis of their frequency distributions. The means for the parent variables were calculated for the three groups and a one way analysis of variance was performed between the three groups. A test of linearity (Blalock, 1972) was performed to see if the analyses indicated significant deviations from linearity.

For socialization there were significant deviations from linearity for three of the parent variables; mother firm control ($F = 4.59$, $df = 2$ and 141; $p < .05$), Mother power assertion ($F = 4.59$, $df = 2$ and 141; $p < .05$), and Father power assertion ($F = 3.27$, $df = 2$ and 141; $p < .05$). The means of the parent variables for the high, middle and low socialization groups are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Deviations From Linearity with Socialization

	Socialization		
	Low	Middle	High
Mother Firm Control	-3.33	-3.54	-5.13
Mother Power Assertion	4.99	5.24	1.61
Father Power Assertion	7.49	7.34	3.48

For each of the three parent variables it is the high socialization group that deviates significantly from linearity. The high socialization group rated their mothers as low in firm control and rated both parents as low in power assertion. The middle and low groups had very similar parental ratings. It appears that only the high socialization group had consistently non-forceful parenting.

For the survey of ethical attitudes there were deviations from linearity for father psychological control ($F = 3.80$, df - 2 and 141; $p < .05$) and father rejection ($F = 3.21$, df - 2 and 141; $p < .05$). The means for these two parent variables are presented below in Table 5.

Table 5
Parent-Child Means for Ethical Attitudes

	Survey of Ethical Attitudes		
	Low	Middle	High
Father Psychological Control	8.70	7.50	8.58
Father Rejection	-2.53	-4.60	-2.94

The middle group on ethical attitudes rated their fathers as being less psychologically controling and less rejecting.

Non-linear exploration of empathy and autonomy revealed no significant deviations from linearity with the parent variables.

The final stage of the data analysis was concerned with possible interactive effects of key parent-child dimensions on the character variables. Baumrind (1971) has suggested the ideal parent is high in acceptance and

and also firm in control. To investigate this proposition in the present study, the parent variables induction acceptance and firm control were dichotomized at the median for both parents. Two by two analyses of variance were then run to test for possible interactive effects for each parent.

With socialization there was a significant interaction between the mother variables of induction-acceptance and firm control. The highest degree of socialization was noted in the group of subjects who rated their mothers as high in acceptance and low in control. The lowest socialization is noted in the low acceptance and firm control group. The means for the four groups are presented below in Table 6.

The interaction of these parent variables with empathy as the criterion was also significant ($F = 7.51$, $df = 1$ and 143; $p < .01$).

The interaction of father induction-acceptance and firm-control was significant for empathy only ($F = 4.86$, $df = 1$ and 143; $p < .05$). The results for empathy are given in Table 7.

Table 6

Socialization Means for Interaction of Induction-Acceptance and Firm Control for Mother

		Firm Control	
		Low	High
Induction-Acceptance	Low	33.56	31.20
	High	37.74	33.42

Table 7

Empathy Means for Interaction of Induction-Acceptance and Firm Control for Both Mother and Father

		Firm Control	
		Low	High
Mother	Low	15.25	14.83
Induction-Acceptance	High	16.81	15.47
Father	Low	15.24	15.06
Induction-Acceptance	High	16.73	16.00

Taken as a whole, the findings of this study are consistent with the current trends in the literature. The acceptance dimension of parent-child relationships was confirmed as a key antecedent to socialization and empathy. This single dimension showed the strongest relationship to the character variables and seemed to supersede the other variables involved in the parent-child interaction.

The findings related to parental control variables were somewhat divergent from some of the previous literature on childrearing practices. Baumrind's (1971) suggestion that the ideal parental components included high acceptance and also a fairly high level of control was not supported in this study. For this sample the more permissive parental transactions with high acceptance and low control seemed to be the most facilitative of moral character development. In fact, the control dimension was negatively correlated with the acceptance dimension, indicating that subjects who saw their parents as accepting tended also to see them as lax in control.

These findings can be explained in part by the developmental trends in the literature. While control may be an important facilitator of moral character in young children, it appears to represent a counterproductive influence as viewed by late adolescents. One of the needs for further research is related to the above contradiction. At what age is parental control facilitative of moral development and at what age does it become detrimental? Future research can hopefully clarify this issue.

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